Some English Inns From Long Ago

By MAUD HUDNUT CHAPIN.

THERE is probably no way in which the customs of England and America differ more than in the matter of inns, or hotels. Their very names suggest it. Who would expect lifts and bathrooms at "The Spotted Cow," "The God Begot Inn," "The Mortal Man" or "The Beetle and Wedge"? These English hostelries remain a law unto themselves, placidly indifferent to the demands of modern life; guests may come and guests may go, but they remain.

Perhaps in nothing do they present greater contrast to the American hotel than in the question of food. There is no doubt in my mind that the English palate does not demand or sanction our feverish desire for variety. To be a cook there is to be harassed by no demand for the new and the strange in *hors d'oeuvres* or salad. Roast and boiled it is and ever shall be, and as for salad, tomato will serve alike king and commoner.

Looking back over a fairly wide experience of English hostelries I recall an episode which occurred at Penzance. The inn where we stayed was the best and commanded a splendid station on that incomparable blue bay. We had arrived cold and hungry from our journey, longing for something hot, but not daring to expect it. We were wise. Cold joints stood upon the sideboard and boiled potatoes—which must once have felt heat. Bread is mostly eaten dry at luncheon, but when we found this was the order of the day at Penzance, we rebelled and asked for butter. Such a demand was too distressing for our waiter to cope with and he hurried to consult his chief, who approached gravely, not with the butter-wouldn't-melt-in-his-mouth expression, but with one of pity, blent with scorn of the American table manners.

"We don't serve butter with lunching, sir. It is locked up in the safe, sir."

"Work the combination and get it out," we replied implacably.

Seeing that we would be buttered, he withdrew and after a long period of suspense returned with a few thin, curly pieces which, with strict economy, saw us through.

But the *rara avis* of inns was the "Maid's Head" at Norwich, where I would advise you to spend a night in the ancient bedroom where Queen Elizabeth once unruffed and laid her down to rest. Her picture hung above the cavernous fireplace. I found myself wondering: Were those straightly brisked wooden stays removed to allow for some natural yawns as the mortal woman snuggled down into eight feet or so of bed and feathers?

Shortcomings Seen by American.

In our experience of inns it was never our fate to win the respect or commendation of any head waiter, and I would advise those with high blood pressure or for any cause denied the elegant indulgence of wine, to make no attempt at this distinction. Enough for such a traveler if he be suffered to drink water in the august presence, winning, perhaps, some trifling notice by ordering a bottle of Perrier which, if he take lukewarm, demanding no ice, will rescue him from the reproach of the mere drinker of water. How often I have watched these dining room functionaries bound forward to minister to some Englishman, whose discriminating palate is the product of generations of two, and even three, bottle men. Nothing, not even a large gratuity, will win this spontaneous tribute to the water drinker and he will look for it in vain. In the dining room of a London hotel I have seen rows of half-consumed bottles, each bearing the owner's name and which the head waiter decants with a solicitude seldom displayed in the more important affairs of life.

Among the inn dignitaries Boots must not be overlooked, for he is almost as important as the Head Porter—in fact, he can assume both incarnations, and must then be entreated for all local information, stamps, telegrams or time tables. The Simon pure Hall Porter wears many glittering medals and appears as a stout and often pampered autocrat. We were far less nervous with the proprietor himself than with his minions, and when the Head Waiter bent over us—that was before he knew our disgraceful drink habits—asking what special wine we would have with our joint he was as difficult to refuse and as respectable as some great functionary. When we spoke of water a blight was cast upon us, and from that minute dinner came to us tepid and savorless from the hand of a young waiter who was being worked in.

It never seems to dawn on the English innkeeper that on a cold, drenching day the wandering guest might be appealed to by something hot for lunch. There is an invariableness about cold lamb and ham which leaves one as spiritless as the unsalted porridge which is invariably served in a soup plate for breakfast. We ceased after a time to dash our unsubdued wills against these laws and submitted.

The Function of Afternoon Tea.

But to return to the Maid's Head—Elizabeth's, I suppose—where fifteen shillings procured us a bedroom of a shape impossible to square by geometric laws, but which was entrancingly homelike, with well polished mahogany furniture and flowered chintz bed hangings. Its lattice window overlooked a hidden court filled with greenery and open to the blue sky, where maids, with streamers flying from their caps, passed frequently to and fro, exchanging humorous abuse with a young Boots in training who, like Sam Weller, was engaged upon a row of down-at-heel shoes. As I leaned on the windowsill looking into the green heart of the ancient inn I heard the great boom of the cathedral bell strike 4. "Tea time!" I cried irreverently. "Let's go down to the funny old entrance court and have some!"

The Maid's Head, I must tell you, stands with its shoulder to the street which leads to the Cathedral and the Sampson and Hercules House. Through a low archway one enters a glass covered court where all the life and business of the antique hostelry center. On one side the homelike office, over which a woman always presides and where bottles decorate the shelves, here gin and water, or whisky neat, is decanted by the dignified female in charge, whom I hesitate to designate barmaid, and who with the head waiter, or Boots, decides your fitness for the inn's best or worst. Across the flagged pavement were the kitchen offices and the coffee room, from which, being somewhat below the street, only the feet and legs of the public could be identified as they passed before the Maid's Head. Boots has his cubbyhole off this court and in its dim archives I saw rows of shoes awaiting his busy brush.

Tea served in this court at little garden tables was not unattended by a thrill of excitement when a fly suddenly thundered into the small area or a motor sped in among the tea drinkers. In England any meal can be dispensed with, but never tea, and those outlanders whose time or appetite forbids their assisting at its cozy rites are beyond the pale. English people eat so frequently that the custom has been laid to climate, dampness, the cold or the east wind, but we simplified the problem by laying it to appetite! At railway stations as many buns and cups of tea are sold as "bookings" and jolly little refreshment wagons are trundled down the crowded platforms, their steaming brasses carrying with them an atmosphere which makes even a station homelike. But it is even more exciting to wire ahead for tea, which at some appointed station is put through your carriage window and onto your lap in a delightful wicker tray, and at 4 o'clock it is not unusual to be in a compartment where tray touches tray on the travelers' knees and the English reserve exhales in speech.

Sources of Delight.

Once, when we were boating on the Thames, we found ourselves under the ancient spire of Abington, hungry and tired after a long morning's row. Wandering up the quaint streets and under carved and shadowy eaves in search of our midday mutton—*revenons a nos moutons* might be said with truth throughout the length and breadth of the land—we found it at the Crown and Thistle. Here we sat down to the usual things, "cold and boiled," with the addition of pickles. We finished off, or were finished, by a sweet of gooseberries which no sugar could sweeten, for we tried. The cook had known this and spared an effort. Over these gooseberries a custard had been poured, flavored with almond and made, alas! of egg powder. The war has taught the English cooks its use, and now they revel in its abuse.

The Barley Moo, an ancient hostelry of old England where John Falstaff might have taken his ease.

The Crown and Thistle leans curiously out over the tiny street, and the pedestrian as he looms in sight of the diner looks for an instant as though he must walk straight through the window and onto the table, until a happy twist in the thoroughfare relieves the anxious mind. Our lunch was brought from some remote kitchen across a kind of farm courtyard. Patience waited upon it, and, had it started hot, it would have had as much time to cool as our desire. But when it came we plucked up courage to eat and to ask the drab looking slavey for hot tea. We felt sorry for her bewilderment, and had we been in the hands of a real waiter we had not dared proffer such a request at luncheon—but we were tired and cold and she seemed a weak vessel.

Not infrequently the appointments of these rustic hostelries are amazing. Fine linen covers the table, while china, with flowered sprigs and shapes to delight the eye, is set before me. So homelike, so confiding are the little English inns that in some I have stirred my tea with a silver spoon. Delightful is the personal service one gets in them—the sense of leisure, the restfulness of returning to those more intimate and simple customs which for the weary modern possess a potent charm. Once overcome your own particular custom in food, accept the scarcity of water, and you will be prepared, with Shenstone, to sing the praise of the old fashioned inn.

"Who e'er has traveled life's dull round,
Where'er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn."

I was told the poet scratched these lines on a window pane of the Red Lion at Henley. The night we stopped there I was content to realize their truth as I lay in one of the sleepy old bedrooms listening to the placid flow of the Thames below my window.

Barley Mow Is Something to See.

Who has heard of "The Barley Mow," I wonder—the smallest and quaintest inn of all the rustic brotherhood? It stands a little way back from the river and we reached it after a long, showery day on the water. It was not, however, our first objective, for we had planned to sleep at the Plough, and once putting our hand to it we remembered the fate of him who turned back.

It was dusk when we reached the remote backwater which glides past its tiny landing, hidden among alder bushes. All day through sun and shower we had talked of the Plough, priding ourselves on being the rare American who got at such places where hardship under a thatch becomes romance. Near the landing several fishing boats floated on the placid stream and meeting branches made an arch of twilight. The hush was so profound that only the whir of a dragon fly could be heard or the dreamy splash of water against the boat. It seemed long until my companion returned from his quest with the news that fishermen had filled the inn to capacity and the indifferent "Plough" had turned us aside like a damp furrow. Later we were glad, for at the next village half a mile down the river we found the Barley Mow—rustically called "Moo."

I am really sorry for any one who has not seen the Barley Moo, nestling in its flower garden like something almost human, its casements looking out from under a blond sunbonnet of thatch. Yellow roses wreathed the eaves and made garlands about the tiny porch. Damp and laden as we were with bags and rugs, we stood for a moment enchanted. Night was falling and before this sudden apparition of antiquity we felt that we had found our way back to an age of innocence. Who could imagine making such a house with the idea of renting it or of bartering it for anything else in the world? But for love a man might plaster its low walls, cross its black timbers in quaint designs, or weave the brown reed roof as a bird weaves her nest. Through the long dreaming years it had become a part of nature herself and seemed to have taken on color and beauty like the moss green bark of trees.

We saw a curl of smoke ascending from the chimney, a glimmer of candlelight shone out from the embowered casements, and, tired but happy, we passed through the low door, and confident that the Barley Moo would give us shelter.

It was delicious to drop to sleep in our tiny room, with its one candle, where the midsummer night never wholly obscured the casement's square of light. Setting open the rude lattice and looking out into the garden, we seemed to have retired to a time as remote as when Shakespeare made immortal love in the cottage at Shottery. By morning the rain, which fell softly all night long, had only wet an inch or two of the furry thatch round the window.

Later when we were dressed and the sun came out a smell of bacon and toast was wafted up the steep stairway and I felt that a week would be none too long to digest the atmosphere of the Barley Moo, or the quaint, beautiful village, just across the river. A bridge—old in seeming as the Canterbury Pilgrims—here spans the Thames and at intervals there are niches in its narrow stone causeway for the pesdestrian to tuck himself away and so avoid the hurrying cart or motor. A penny toll is collected from each passer-by and at the tollhouse I saw an old placard posted up and this is how it read:

"For every Horse or other Beast drawing any Coach, Caravan, Berlin, Chariot, Vis-a-vis, Barouch, Phaeton, Merino, Calasche, Curricle Chair, Gig, Irish Car, Whiskey, Hearse or like carriage, 6d. For every Ass laden or unladen 1d. For every Ox, Cow, Bull, 1d. For every Calf, Pig, Sheep or Lamb, 1 farthing or for a score 5d."

We hated to leave the Barley Moo, for we could not rely on finding another lodging as primitive and quaint, but after breakfast the sun came out with authority and the spirit of adventure came with it. We consoled ourselves by saying that another night might find us equal joys and as we slid away from the landing stage out into the rippling, sun showered water and under the low arches of the bridge we looked back on the idealic village with a sigh of regret.